

PART 1515—FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT PROCEDURES

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PURPOSE

§ 1515.1 What are these procedures?

The Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552, commonly known as FOIA) is a law which creates a procedure for any person to request official documents and other records from United States Government agencies. The law requires every Federal agency to make available to the public the material requested, unless the material falls under one of the limited exceptions stated in section 552(b)(5) of the Act, and the agency has good reason to refuse the request. These procedures explain how the Council on Environmental Quality—one of several offices in the Executive Office of the President—will carry out the Freedom of Information Act. They are written from the standpoint of a member of the public requesting material from the Council.

ORGANIZATION OF CEQ

§ 1515.2 What is the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)?

(a) The Council on Environmental Quality (“CEQ” or “the Council”) was created by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 through 4347). The Council’s authority is derived from that Act, the Environmental Quality Improvement Act of 1970, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4371–4374), Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1977 (July 15, 1977), and Ex-

ecutive Order 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality, March 5, 1970, as amended by Executive Order 11991, May 24, 1977.

(b) The Council’s primary responsibilities include the following:

(1) To review and evaluate the programs and activities of the Federal Government to determine how they are contributing to the attainment of the national environmental policy;

(2) To assist Federal agencies and departments in appraising the effectiveness of their existing and proposed facilities, programs, policies, and activities affecting environmental quality;

(3) To develop and recommend to the President policies to improve environmental quality to meet the conservation, social, economic, health, and other requirements and goals of the Nation;

(4) To advise and assist the President in achieving international cooperation for dealing with environmental problems;

(5) To assist in coordinating among Federal agencies and departments those programs which affect, protect, and improve environmental quality, including Federal compliance with the environmental impact statement process, and to seek resolution of significant environmental issues;

(6) To foster research relating to environmental quality and the impacts of new or changing technologies; and

(7) To analyze long and short term environmental problems and trends and assist in preparing an annual Environmental Quality Report to the President and the Congress.

(c) The Council maintains a “Quarterly Index” which lists its current policies and procedures, as required by section 552(a)(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. This index is updated and published in the FEDERAL REGISTER quarterly, starting in 1976. The Quarterly Index—and the specific items listed in the index—are available on request from the Freedom of Information Officer. You may also inspect or copy any of these materials at the Council’s office during the hours stated below in § 1515.3(f).

§ 1515.3 How is CEQ organized?

(a) The Council is made up of three members appointed by the President and subject to approval by the Senate. One member is designated as chairman by the President. All three serve in a full-time capacity.

(b) The National Environmental Policy Act and the Environmental Quality Improvement Act give the Council the authority to hire any officers and staff that may be necessary to carry out responsibilities and functions specified in these two Acts. Also, the use of consultants and experts is permitted.

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(c) In addition to the three members, the Council has program and legal staff.

(d) The Council has no field or regional offices.

(e) The Council has a public affairs office which is responsible for providing information to the general public, the Congress, and the press. If you are interested in general information about the Council or have questions about the Council's recent activities or policy positions, you should call this office at (202) 633-7005 or write to the "Public Affairs Office" of the Council at the address given in the next paragraph.

NOTE: The CEQ public affairs office can respond fully and promptly to most questions you may have; the Council suggests that the Freedom of Information Act procedures be used when you are seeking a specific document and have had difficulty obtaining it.

(f) The Council is located at 722 Jackson Place NW., Washington, DC 20006. Office hours are 9–5:30, Monday through Friday, except legal holidays. If you wish to meet with any of the staff, please write or phone ahead for an appointment. The main number is 202-633-7027.

PROCEDURES FOR REQUESTING RECORDS

§ 1515.5 How to make a Freedom of Information Act request.

(a) The Chairman has appointed a Freedom of Information Officer who will be responsible for overseeing the Council's administration of the Freedom of Information Act and for receiving, routing, and overseeing the processing of all Freedom of Information requests. The Chairman has also appointed an Appeals Officer who is responsible for processing any appeals.

(b) *Requesting information from the Council.* (1) When you make a Freedom of Information Act request to the Council, the Freedom of Information Officer shall decide how to respond to—or "make an initial determination on"—your request within 10 working days from the date the Officer receives the request. The Freedom of Information Officer will then provide you with written notification of the determination.

(2) You can make a Freedom of Information Act request by writing a letter which states that you are making a Freedom of Information Act request. Address your letter to:

Freedom of Information Officer, Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President, 722 Jackson Place NW., Washington, DC 20006.

(3) In your request you should identify the desired record or reasonably describe it. The request should be as specific as possible so that the item can be readily found. You should not make blanket requests, such as requests for "the entire file

of" or "all materials relating to" a specified subject.

(4) The Council will make a reasonable effort to assist you in defining the request to eliminate extraneous and unwanted materials and to keep search and copying fees to a minimum. If you have budgetary constraints and anticipate that your request might be costly you may wish to indicate the maximum fee you are prepared to pay for acquiring the information. (See § 1515.15(c) also.)

(5) The 10 day period for making a determination on a request will begin when the records requested are specified or reasonably identifiable.

(6) Despite its name, the Freedom of Information Act does not require a government agency to create or research information that you would like or that you may think the agency should have. The Act only requires that existing records be made available to the public.

(c) *Council's response to a request.* (1) Upon receipt of any request under the Act, the Freedom of Information Officer shall direct the request to the appropriate staff member at the Council, who will review the request and advise the Freedom of Information Officer as soon as possible.

(2) If it is appropriate to grant the request, the staff member will immediately collect the requested materials in order to accompany, wherever possible, the Freedom of Information Officer's letter notifying you of the decision.

(3) If your request is denied, in part or in full, the letter notifying you of the decision will be signed by the Freedom of Information Officer, and will include the names of any other individuals who participated in the decision. The letter will include the reasons for any denial and the procedure for filing an appeal.

(d) *Appeals.* (1) If you are not satisfied with the response you have received from the Freedom of Information Officer, you may ask the Council to reconsider the decision. You should explain what material you still wish to receive, and why you believe the Council should disclose this to you. This is called an "appeal." You must make your appeal within 45 days of the date on the letter which denied your request.

(2) You can make an appeal by writing a letter to:

FOIA Appeals Officer, Council on Environmental Quality, Executive Office of the President, 722 Jackson Place NW., Washington, DC 20006.

(3) Your letter should specify the records being requested and ask the Appeals Officer to review the determination made by the Freedom of Information Officer. The letter should explain the basis for the appeal.

(4) The Appeals Officer shall decide the appeal—or "make a final determination"—within 20 working days from the date the Officer re-

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ceives the appeal. The Appeals Officer (or designee) will send you a letter informing you of the decision as soon as it is made. If the Appeals Officer denies your request, in part or in whole, the letter will also notify you of the provisions for judicial review and the names of any persons who participated in the final determination of the appeal.

(e) *Extending the Council's time to respond.* In unusual circumstances, the time limits for response to your request (paragraphs (b) and (d) of this section) may be extended by the Council for not more than 10 working days. Extensions may be granted by the Freedom of Information Officer in the case of initial requests and by the Appeals Officer in the case of any appeals. The extension period may be split between the initial request and the appeal but may not exceed 10 working days overall. Any extension will be made or confirmed to you in writing and will set forth the reasons for the extension and the date that the final determination is expected. The term "unusual circumstances" means:

- (i) The need to search for and collect the requested records from * * * establishments that are separate from the office processing the request;
- (ii) The need to search for, collect, and appropriately examine a voluminous amount of separate and distinct records which are demanded in a single request; or
- (iii) The need for consultation, which shall be conducted with all practicable speed, with another agency having a substantial interest in the determination of the request or among two or more components of the agency having substantial subject-matter interest therein.

(5 U.S.C. 552(a)(6)(B))

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION

§ 1515.10 What information is available, and how can it be obtained?

(a) When a request for information has been approved, in whole or in part, you may make an appointment to inspect or copy the materials requested during regular business hours by writing or telephoning the Freedom of Information Officer at the address or phone number given in § 1515.3(f). You may be charged reasonable fees for copying materials, as explained by § 1515.15. The Council on Environmental Quality will permit copying of any available material but will reserve the right to limit the number of copies made with the Council's copying facilities.

(b) In general, all records of the Council are available to the public, as required by the Freedom of Information Act. The Council claims the right, where it is applicable, to withhold material under the provisions specified in the Freedom of Information Act as amended (5 U.S.C. 552(b)).

(c) The legislative history of the establishment of the Council states that the Congress intended

the Council to be a confidential advisor to the President on matters of environmental policy. Therefore, members of the public should presume that communications between the Council and the President (and their staffs) are confidential and ordinarily will not be released; they will usually fall, at a minimum, within Exemption 5 of the Act. The Freedom of Information Officer shall review each request, however, to determine whether the record is exclusively factual or may have factual portions which may be reasonably segregated and made available to the requester. Furthermore, on the recommendation of the FOIA Officer or Appeals Officer, the Council will consider the release of an entire record, even if it comes within an exemption or contains policy advice, if its disclosure would not impair Executive policymaking processes or the Council's participation in decision-making.

COSTS

§ 1515.15 What fees may be charged, and how should they be paid?

(a) Following is the schedule of fees you may be charged for the search and reproduction of information available under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552, as amended.

(1) *Search for records.* Five dollars per hour when the search is conducted by a clerical employee. Eight dollars per hour when the search is conducted by a professional employee. There will be no charge for searches of less than one hour.

(2) *Duplication of records.* Records will be duplicated at a rate of \$0.10 per page for copying of 10 pages or more. There will be no charge for duplicating 9 pages or less.

(3) *Other.* When no specific fee has been established for a service, or the request for a service does not fall under categories (1) and (2), the Administrative Officer is authorized to establish an appropriate fee based on "direct costs" as provided in the Freedom of Information Act. Examples of services covered by this provision include searches involving computer time or special travel, transportation, or communication costs.

(b) If the Council anticipates that the fees chargeable under this section will amount to more than \$25, or the maximum amount specified in your request, you shall be promptly notified of the amount of the anticipated fee or the closest estimate of the amount. In such instances you will be advised of your option to consult with Council personnel in order to reformulate the request in a manner which will reduce the fees, yet still meet your needs. A reformulated request shall be considered a new request, thus beginning a new 10 working day period for processing.

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(c) Fees must be paid in full prior to issuance of the requested copies. In the event you owe money for previous request, copies of records will not be provided for any subsequent request until the debt has been paid in full.

(d) Search costs are due and payable even if the record which was requested cannot be located after all reasonable efforts have been made, or if the FOI Officer determines that a record which has been requested is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act as amended and is to be withheld.

(e) Payment shall be in the form either of a personal check or bank draft drawn on a bank in the

United States, or a postal money order. Checks shall be made payable to General Services Administration. You should mail or deliver any payment for services to the Administrative Office, Council on Environmental Quality, 722 Jackson Place NW., Washington, DC 20006.

(f) A receipt for fees paid will be given upon request. Refunds of fees paid for services actually rendered will not be made.

(g) The Council may waive all or part of any fee provided for in this section when the Freedom of Information Officer (or designee) deems it to be in either the Council's interest or in the general public's interest.